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SUBJECT: SAR-E-PUL GOVERNOR'S POLITICAL HOUSECLEANING TARGETS OWN
DEPUTY, BUT MOTIVES QUESTIONED

11. (SBU) Summary: The strained relationship between Sar-e-pul Governor Bashir Qanat Chayabi and Deputy Governor Qamaruddin Shekib has hit a new low with disclosure of Chayabi's proposal to the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) to have Shekib replaced with an associate of Member of Parliament Mohammed Fahimi. Chayabi has also recommended that IDLG replace four district administrators and separately asked two ministries to replace their provincial department heads, all allegedly for poor performance. The governor justifies these personnel moves as "house cleaning," but they smack of political patronage. Six months into the job, Chayabi, a former mujahideen commander with no previous government experience, intends to shake up the status quo in his administration, but perhaps for the wrong reasons. The story unfolding in the Sar-e-pul governor's office is characteristic of the kinds of challenges facing the IDLG as it attempts to build credible sub-national government institutions throughout the country.

Tensions Building Since Governor's Appointment

12. (SBU) In a confidential letter to UNAMA written last November, Deputy Governor Shekib outlined his problems with Chayabi, who was appointed governor of Sar-e-pul last August. Shekib, a Sar-e-pul native who has been deputy governor in his home province for the past 5 years, accused Chayabi of stripping him of responsibilities and of regarding the deputy governorship as an "appendage" rather than as an intrinsic part of the provincial administration. Governor Chayabi doesn't know how to delegate responsibilities to his deputy because Chayabi doesn't understand what his own responsibilities as governor are, claimed Shekib. It is unclear whether Governor Chayabi is aware of Shekib's letter.

Governor Asks IDLG to Replace His Deputy

13. (SBU) Deputy Governor Shekib, fresh from an IDLG-sponsored trip to the Philippines, disclosed to State PRT officer February 16 that upon returning to Kabul, he met with IDLG deputy director Barna Karimi, who informed him of Governor Chayabi's proposal to have him replaced. Karimi showed him the letter that Chayabi sent to IDLG accusing Shekib of creating distance between the people and the government. Asked by Karimi to comment on that allegation, Shekib rejected it as patently false, offered to resign on the spot if any supporting evidence would surface, and encouraged IDLG to conduct its own investigation into the matter. Karimi then told Shekib how he had been visited by Member of Parliament Fahimi from Balkhab district, Sar-e-pul, along with three other people who lobbied him hard for Shekib's removal from office. One of the other three who accompanied Fahimi is Mohammed Tahir, reportedly a business associate of Fahimi who, like him, is a Hazara from Balkhab. (Note: Shekib claims that Tahir is also a member of Fahimi's Insejmi Meli Party.) Karimi told Shekib to return to his post in Sar-e-pul pending a decision on the governor's proposal. Shekib doesn't know how much longer he'll have a job. He remarked that if IDLG endorses

Chayabi's recommendation and removes him for "no good reason," it would be a complete waste of the thousands of dollars spent by the government on the Philippines trip to strengthen his capacity as deputy governor.

MP's Motives For Seeking Deputy's Ouster

14. (SBU) Asked by State PRT officer to speculate as to why MP Fahimi is seeking his ouster, Shekib said the MP has been pressuring him to decide favorably on petitions submitted to the provincial government by Fahimi's supporters. Shekib said he has refused to take sides in what he says is a conflict pitting ex-commander Fahimi, a former Wahdat-Mohaqiq Party member, against ex-commanders of the Wahdat-Akbari Party. (Note: Both parties are Hazara-based.) Shekib said he told Fahimi that an MP should be a unifying force in the province, not a divisive one. His refusal to show favoritism precipitated Fahimi's push to have him replaced by working in tandem with Governor Chayabi, assesses Shekib.

Governor: No Contact with MP in Seeking Deputy's Removal

15. (SBU) Later, in a separate meeting the same day with Governor Chayabi, State PRT officer broached the subject of the governor's relationship with his proposed deputy Tahir. When asked whether he knew if Tahir had ties to MP Fahimi, Chayabi said he was not aware of any. Pressed to explain how he - a native of Taka province - settled upon Tapir - a Sar-e-pul native - to be his deputy, Chayabi responded vaguely that he had conducted his own search for a new deputy and that Fahimi had not contacted him about Tahir. Perhaps, Chayabi suggested, Tahir had contacted Fahimi and enlisted the latter's support. (Note: Chayabi's explanation is implausible in view of the fact that the timing of Chayabi's letter to the IDLG and

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Fahimi's subsequent meeting with IDLG appear to have been coordinated to coincide with Shekib's trip to the Philippines.)

Governor Also Targets District Governors...

16. (SBU) Shekib said Governor Chayabi had written a letter to IDLG a few months ago recommending that certain district administrators be replaced. Shekib said Chayabi did not seek his opinion at any time before sending the letter. In Shekib's view, some of the people who Chayabi wants named to those positions are not qualified. For example, he cited IDLG's rejection of Hamid Palawan - a Chayabi nominee - as the new district governor of Gosfundi because Palawan is illiterate. But Chayabi's other proposed changes in district administrator appointments for Sozma Qala, Sayyad, and Balkhab districts remain pending before IDLG. Chayabi's nominees are not really his own people; each has been pitched to Chayabi by political figures who have pressured Chayabi to support them, Shekib alleged.

...and Line Directors

17. (SBU) Governor Chayabi has requested the Ministries of Education and Public Works change their Sar-e-pul line directors for underperforming, and has submitted names of candidates to replace them. But Shekib claims that Chayabi's nominee for education director has not passed the civil service reform (CSR) process, and that the Ministry of Education sent a letter to Chayabi rejecting his recommendation for that reason. (Note: The current education director has passed the CSR process.) Apparently not satisfied with the Ministry of Education's response, Chayabi sent a letter to President Karzai's office seeking the president's intervention in the matter, but that effort doesn't appear to have borne fruit. Chayabi is also engaged in a showdown with the Ministry of Public Works (MoPW) by refusing to allow the provincial public works line director to continue working in that capacity. Chayabi confirmed to State PRT officer that MoPW had sent a letter to him requesting that the director be allowed to resume his work. Shekib calls the entire situation embarrassing because ministry officials assume that the governor consults with his team before sending the names of nominees to Kabul, and that's not the case at all in Sar-e-pul.

"Passing the Football"

18. (SBU) Asked what prompted his proposed personnel moves, Governor Chayabi told State PRT officer that he was only exercising his right to make changes when people don't perform up to his expectations. He said he spent the first five months on the job listening to district residents and evaluating the performances of his administrators because he was new to the province. Now, having formed his own opinions of his team, he wants to shake things up. Noting Shekib's five-year tenure as deputy governor, Chayabi asked rhetorically what Shekib had accomplished during that time. He said he was disappointed that the experienced Shekib hadn't stepped forward to help him learn the ropes of governance in Sar-e-pul when he first arrived. Chayabi grew more animated as he laid out his frustrations with his deputy, and used a soccer analogy to call him a poor team player who "doesn't like to pass the ball." Asked if he had ever met with Shekib to express dissatisfaction with his work performance, Chayabi said that he had. (Note: Shekib disputes this.)

State PRT officer pointed out to Chayabi that if the IDLG rejects Chayabi's nominee and allows Shekib to remain as his deputy, both men will have to find a way to work together as a team. The governor, as captain of the team, should make the first pass to his deputy by giving him a project and seeing how well he can implement it. If the governor is not satisfied with the outcome, then he should tell his deputy directly, State PRT officer advised. Chayabi agreed that was a good approach and expressed appreciation for the advice, but he's still hoping for a favorable response from the IDLG regarding his nominee.

Comment

19. (SBU) Governor Chayabi has had a tough time letting go of his jihadi's commander's mindset when it comes to his provincial management. That has strained relations with Shekib and other members of the government, including the provincial council. Chayabi admitted to State PRT officer that there is lots of corruption in his administration and that he's determined to stop it when he learns of it. While his desire to clean house might disrupt some of the corrupt networks inside his administration, one wonders if he may be paving the way for new ones to form if he gets his nominees past the IDLG.

10. (SBU) What is happening in the Sar-e-pul governor's office is indicative of the challenges confronting the IDLG as it strives to

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build credible institutions of sub-national governance across the country. Political interference from power brokers continues to undermine those efforts. It's no secret that politics - not merit - is what landed Chayabi his job as governor. As IDLG's Barna Karimi remarked recently at the ISAF PRT conference in Kabul, district governors are the most important government figures for the tens of millions of Afghans living in rural areas. A corrupt, incompetent district administrator or provincial governor will only widen the gap between the government and the people. With the stakes so high, the IDLG can ill afford to give in to political pressures by recommending unqualified people to be the "most important people" in government.

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